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Flannery's Ghost: Paradigms of the Holy Ghost in Three Stories by Flannery O'Connor¹

Ben Forkner

- 1 Readers of Flannery O'Connor's short stories will not have failed to notice the many references to the Holy Ghost, in one form or another. One story announces the term in its title, "The Temple of the Holy Ghost," and many others refer to it directly, iconographically, or implicitly. "The Enduring Chill" does all three, and adds another dimension by introducing the Holy Ghost as a human character in the form of the mysterious Jesuit priest, Ignatius Vogle, S.J, whose name and whose single-sentence declaration of belief in the "Third Person of the Trinity," haunt the story from beginning to end, all the way through to Father Finn's fierce admonition to Asbury who has almost paralyzed himself through self-pity :

"How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash ? " the priest roared.
 "The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are—a lazy ignorant conceited youth ! " he said, pounding his fist on the little bedside table.
- 2 In my readings of Flannery O'Connor's stories I have come to believe that the presence of the Holy Ghost plays an essential role in the full meaning of her satire. At the same time, however, I need to insist that my interest in the function of the Holy Ghost in the three stories I examine is much more dramatic than doctrinal. Flannery O'Connor herself would no doubt protest that the doctrinal, or what she would call the anagogical, dimension of the Holy Ghost is, in the final assessment, more important than the dramatic, yet I am sure she would also admit that without the dramatic, the story runs the risk of slipping into a sermon, of sacrificing art to theology.
- 3 By dramatic, I refer to the various ways O'Connor introduces the Holy Ghost in her stories both as an element of characterization, and as a guide to testing the implications, and the limits, of her satire. In fact, these two elements are almost indistinguishable from each other. All the main characters in her stories are incomplete, and the Holy Ghost is there to confirm the incompleteness, and to force the

character into confronting the necessity of completeness, often against his or her will. At the same time, the function of the Holy Ghost within the narrative provides the reader with a constant standard of judgment. Without this well-defined, underlying standard, the satirical perspective loses all its power of conviction.

- 4 If incompleteness is the condition, or the sickness, which the Holy Ghost is there to oppose, and ultimately to heal, it must be said too that for Flannery O'Connor the possibility of completeness can be proclaimed, but it is not to be found on earth. For O'Connor the human condition itself can best be understood in terms of perpetual dissatisfaction, of being lost in existence, unfulfilled in the body of the world. She describes her belief very clearly in her essay "The Teaching of Literature." For me, this is the key text behind her theology, her philosophy, and her literary esthetic :

It seems that the fiction writer has a revolting attachment to the poor, for even when he writes about the rich, he is more concerned with what they lack than with what they have. I am very much afraid that to the fiction writer the fact that we shall always have the poor with us is a source of satisfaction, for it means, essentially, that he will always be able to find someone like himself. His concern with poverty is with a poverty fundamental to man. I believe that the basic experience of everyone is the experience of human limitation.

- 5 Since incompleteness is fundamental, that is, not only inescapable, but even necessary to the human condition, the focus of O'Connor's satire has to be located elsewhere, not in the "experience of human limitation," but in the character's refusal to admit limitation, and to face its implications. What is always satirized in O'Connor's stories is certitude and self-satisfaction, never confusion and doubt. When her characters are suddenly stricken by doubt, the search for a solution can begin, and the satire ceases. As O'Connor herself declared in the essay "Novelist and Believer," "At its best our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily."
- 6 This recognition, or, perhaps simply, hope, that the search is the beginning of the solution, is precisely the point where the Holy Ghost enters the O'Connor narrative. It is always there to oppose certitude and fixed opinions, and it always suggests that wholeness (in English a cognate of holiness, and health) can only be approached through a process of reaching out, and reaching in. The kinetic idea of process (of movement and of being moved) can be found in every reference to the Holy Ghost, going back to the earliest New Testament texts. It is also the reason so many writers have been attracted by the Holy Ghost as a metaphor of a living relationship, of an exchange back and forth between two entities, or two beings, often to counter the fear of being locked into opposition, with no escape from dead-end duality.
- 7 The early English Romantics, for example, used the analogy of the Holy Ghost to explain the process of reconciling the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, in every creative act of human perception. Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, applies the Holy Ghost and the trinitarian structure to human experience in a number of ways, almost as convinced as Augustine himself in his great theological treatise *On the Trinity* that the concept of three is the only way the movement of human consciousness and human development can be explained and understood.
- 8 If we need an example of a modern writer closer in time to O'Connor applying the Holy Ghost dramatically, and symbolically, we need only turn to James Joyce, whom she herself evokes in one of her most explicit Holy Ghost narratives, "The Enduring Chill." Joyce involves trinitarian reflections and structures in all of his major works. As

Richard Ellmann has shown in his study, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, *Ulysses* itself is deliberately conceived according to variations on such a structure. The narrative proceeds dialectically, isolating contraires like body and soul, art and nature, time and space, male and female, in order to reconcile them (at the very least in the reader's active consciousness). The single best-known example from Joyce appears during the library episode of *Ulysses*, when Stephen Dedalus uses the Trinity metaphorically to explain the growth of personality, from unformed childhood to the individualized adult, by identifying the Father with the underlying potential (or idea) of the human being, and the Son as the actual realization, or evolving manifestation of the idea. The Holy Ghost is, once more, associated with the dynamic relationship (or power of communication) between the Father and the Son.

- 9 Flannery O'Connor would have found Stephen's metaphor congenial, despite Stephen's (and Joyce's) rejection of the Church. O'Connor would have recognized immediately that Joyce is reviving one of the basic spiritual attributes of the Holy Ghost, the divine gift of communication, the "speaking of tongues" mentioned in Acts 2, 1-5, and again in I Corinthians, 14. There are other properties of the Holy Ghost, always associated with movement and power and illumination, wind and fire and light, but language and particularly the act of speaking seem to dominate, and to comprise all the others. But even with the act of speaking, distinctions have to be made, and Paul in I Corinthians is very careful in making them. First of all, the activity of the Holy Ghost is identified (for the fallen human being) with the process of searching (I Corinthians 2, 10, "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."), and, equally important, the manifestation of the search in the act of speaking can be both inward and outward (I Corinthians 13, 2-5). Because the speaking is a search for certitude, and not a mere repetition of what is already known, Paul uses the term "unknown tongue." "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself, but he that prophesieth edifieth the church" (I Corinthians 13, 4).
- 10 I believe that Flannery O'Connor seizes upon these distinctions, dramatically, as a way of revealing the progressive evolution of her main characters, and I hope to demonstrate this by looking at the three quite different characters of "The Temple of the Holy Ghost," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and "The River." I turn to "The Temple of the Holy Ghost" first, simply because most of the references to the Holy Ghost are so explicit, and so obvious. Most studies of the story, however, examine these references statically, as if they hover over and beyond the life of the girl, and the movement of the narrative. They are signs of a divine ideal, absolute and eternal, but they are not shown to be involved with the story's dramatic action. The title of course refers to Paul's celebration of the human body in I Corinthians 3, 16, and I Corinthians 6, 19, as spiritualized by the Holy Ghost, and thus a sacred responsibility not to be taken lightly. Conventionally, the text is often used in sermons to urge purity, and especially sexual abstinence, at least up until the sanctification of marriage. And this is the way the term is introduced in the narrative, by the two older girls, Joanne and Susan, who have learned the expression from Sister Perpetua at their convent school, Mount St. Scholastica.
- 11 Iconographically, "The Temple of the Holy Ghost" has been studied in detail, with much valuable insight into the color symbolism, sexual imagery, and doctrinal differences between Catholic and Protestant rites. For me, though, little of this commentary has

done justice to the change in character Flannery O'Connor herself always insisted on as fundamental in her fiction. Once we read the girl's interior embedded narrative as a movement from certitude to doubt, from self-satisfaction to a sense of inadequacy and incompleteness, it becomes easier to recognize the role of the Holy Ghost as a vital force behind the transition. Appropriately, given Paul's insistence on one of the manifestations of the Holy Ghost as an inward speaking out, a private search, the change in the girl's character is demonstrated best in three episodes where she is alone, thinking to herself, the primal condition for self-judgment, and for reaching out after the truth.

- 12 Before these three episodes occur, the girl is presented as frustrated and unhappy at being excluded from the couple formed by the two older girls from the convent school. At the same time, she considers herself superior to them, and to almost every other character in the story. She mocks the boarder, Mrs Kirby, a fastidious spinster who is being courted by the clownish Mr Cheatham. They are easy to mock, and the girl's comments turn the satire into a sort of comical farce, at least up to the point where she laughs so hard at her own joking that she "threw herself backward in her chair," and "fell out of it." She is just as "fallen" as they are, and at this point of the story the reader may begin to notice all the odd couples that populate the narrative, including the girl and her mother. The father is missing. Trinities everywhere in the narrative are conspicuous by their absence. Of course the cruelest example of a sterile, frustrated duality (at least in the flesh) is the hermaphrodite at the fair, a terrible inadequacy that the girl will eventually bring to bear on her own condition. She falls one more time, off the barrel she had been standing on in the bushes, after the two Protestant boys have demonstrated their ignorance by failing to recognize either the language or the origins of the great Aquinas hymn, "Pange Lingua," "Sing My Tongue," one more forceful reminder of the theme of language in the story.
- 13 After the other children have left for the fair, the girl is left alone. She goes upstairs, and instead of turning on the electric light, she withdraws into her own mind: "She ... let the darkness collect and make the room smaller and more private." The dominant image of the Holy Ghost in this episode is the beacon light from the fair which the girl imagines as "searching the air as if it were hunting for the lost sun." This is the signal for the search and the inner communion to begin, and the girl confesses to herself her pride, her inadequacy, and expresses her desire for completeness, for filling her life with all that is missing: "she felt that she would have to be much more than just a doctor or an engineer. She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know". Still, the desire doesn't take her far beyond her certitudes and her fear of change. She dreams of becoming a martyr, and of going "immediately to heaven" and before the episode is finished she returns to her old dead language of pride and repetition : "' Lord, Lord, thank You that I'm not in the Church of God, thank You Lord, thank You !' and got back in bed and kept repeating it until she went to sleep". One other image in this episode worth noting is the girl's thinking of the "martyrs waiting to have their tongues cut out by the Roman soldier." The deprivation of speech resonates in her mind, and in the metaphorical context of the narrative, as an ultimate sacrifice. But it resonates too as a counter-reflection of the fact that the loss of a tongue cannot destroy the truth-seeking impulse of the inner voice.

- 14 As the Holy Ghost texts remind us, the act of speaking is often more interior than exterior, and in the second stage of the girl's evolution, we find her back to herself, alone with her private thoughts. She is lying awake in bed after the two older girls have come back from the fair, and have told her about the hermaphrodite. Given the young girl's sexual innocence, and fascinated ignorance, it is not surprising that the account of the hermaphrodite occupies all her mind as she goes to sleep. What is surprising is the way her imagination transforms the scene into a sermon given by the hermaphrodite on the Holy Ghost. She could hear the freak saying, "God made me thisaway and I don't dispute hit," and the people saying, "Amen. Amen." There is certainly not the slightest touch of satire in her thoughts. On the contrary, the self-centered, alienating contempt of the girl has given way to a new vision of human incompleteness, and human communion. Through the movement of her imagination she succeeds in combining both powers of the Holy Ghost, an inward and outward communion ("He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church"). Dramatically, this episode marks a crucial change in the girl's development. Unlike her return to solitude and self-centeredness in the first passage, here her thinking continues to search, and to reach out, ending, as she falls asleep, with a solemn celebration of belonging to the human family ("The people began to slap their hands without making a loud noise and with a regular beat between the Amens, more and more softly, as if they knew there was a child near, half asleep.").
- 15 The third passage takes place in the convent school chapel, after she and her mother have brought the two older girls back. O'Connor is realist enough to know that no character, and no human being, changes absolutely, and that we will always resist our own evolution. Realistically, then, we find the girl back in a solitary and satirical mode, comically condemning every human flaw in the convent except her own. In the midst of singing, once more, the hymn "Pangue Lingua," and having reached the last two verses, the "Tantum Ergo" in praise of the Holy Ghost, she stops herself, begins to pray, as O'Connor writes, "mechanically," then stops again, and thinks about the words (the words she herself has imagined) of the hermaphrodite in the carnival tent: "The freak was saying, 'I don't dispute it. This is the way He wanted me to be.'"
- 16 The change is definite, though not complete. Nothing is on earth. But the searching for completeness has begun. The challenges will continue, from within and without, but without the challenges there would be no search. Even the big nun, "swooping" down on the girl after the hymn, and "mashing the side of her face into the crucifix hitched onto her belt" becomes a sort of involuntary avatar of the Holy Ghost's necessary presence.
- 17 At the end of the story, riding home in the car, the girl is alone with her thoughts once more, but now she is looking out the window, reaching beyond her own private world. The reader is left with a final image (confirming both the dramatic and the doctrinal demands of the narrative) of human inadequacy and suffering, but also, with the movement forward and the looking out, the possibility of greater completeness. The road must lead somewhere: "The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees."
- 18 In turning to the two stories, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and "The River," I will be much briefer, and will limit my focus to the problem of language, more precisely, the problem of attitude toward language, an attitude which functions dramatically as a

crucial element of characterization. Again, I am interested more in dramatic than in doctrinal truths, but even the dramatic problem of language is best grasped when contextualized by the Pauline definitions of the Holy Ghost, in particular the inner and outer act of "speaking" towards communion we have already discussed.

- 19 "A Good Man is Hard to Find" was a favorite story of O'Connor, and the one she chose to read most often when she was invited to appear in public. It was also a story whose critical misreadings exasperated O'Connor to such an extent that she contested them at length in her essay "On Her Own Work" in *Mystery and Manners*. What bothered her the most was the theory that the grandmother was the primary target of the story's satire, an old fool incapable of redemption. Several teachers in fact informed O'Connor that the grandmother was evil, even a witch (otherwise how were they to explain the cat). When one of these teachers complained that his southern students tended to resist this interpretation, O'Connor leaped in to take their side: "I had to tell him that they resisted it because they all had grandmothers or great-aunts just like her at home, and they knew, from personal experience, that the old lady lacked comprehension, but that she had a good heart." And later on, in the same essay, O'Connor adds that she thinks "the unprejudiced reader will feel that the Grandmother has a special kind of triumph in this story which instinctively we do not allow to someone altogether bad." Still, even critics who have accepted O'Connor's defense of the Grandmother often object that the sudden change in the Grandmother's attitude toward the Misfit (the epiphany that leads to her death) is too mechanical, too artificial, completely inconsistent with her actions in the rest of the story.
- 20 Once the reader begins to concentrate on the question of language, however, it is far easier to see how carefully O'Connor has presented the Grandmother, dramatically and symbolically, from the very beginning, as the only character, with the exception, perhaps, of the Misfit, capable of reaching out into the separate life of a fellow human being. Throughout the story, the Grandmother at least demonstrates a willingness to speak, unlike the other members of her family, particularly her single-minded brooding son and his submissive silent wife. The Grandmother's language is politely conventional, even stereotypical, thus the irritation of her son, the mockery of her grand-children, and the satirical bias of many critics. Certainly her speaking, on the surface, seems to be more a phatic gesture than a genuine conversation, or communion, but phatic or not, it is a mode of communication, involving her socially at the very least in the outside world. In the same spirit, again unlike the rest of the family, she has dressed up for the trip as if it were a Sunday outing. This is presented comically, but not satirically. The satire is reserved for the daughter-in-law who is described as "a young woman in slacks, whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green head-kерchief that had two points on the top like a rabbit's ears." Behind or beneath the purely social or public function of the Grandmother's speech, however, there is a undercurrent of private life and inspired searching. She wants to visit her relatives, "her connections," rather than take the dull predictable trip to Florida. Once in the car, she uses her speech to persuade, to amuse, to tell stories, to identify the landmarks, to praise the landscape, to exercise her memory, to anticipate a change in direction, even to lie about the plantation house, always with a purpose. She is the one willing to talk with a stranger, when she strikes up the conversation with Red Sammy, the owner of the roadside restaurant.

- 21 Of course her impulse to speak out, often without thinking, finally betrays her. She is the one who causes the crisis of the story when she cries out, to the Misfit, that she recognizes who he is. The Misfit responds in kind, and proves himself to be as talkative as the Grandmother, equally polite and sociable, less grammatically refined, but just at ease with the ready-made phrase and stock formula. Their similarities in speech are erased, however, when they shift from public to private matters. O'Connor shows the Misfit becoming progressively obscure, evasive, and self-deceptive, as soon as he begins to evoke his past. If the Holy Ghost is symbolically called into play whenever an awareness of failure and inadequacy leads to a new power of speaking, Flannery O'Connor's description of the Grandmother's death as a "triumph" is dramatically confirmed when she loses her old voice ("Alone with the Misfit, the grandmother found that she had lost her voice"). Frozen by fear, devastated by the death of her family, falling down, "not knowing what she was saying," she hears the "crack" in the Misfit's voice, and with the most intimate words of the story, she recovers her own voice, and acknowledges that he is just as vulnerable as she is ("Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children! ") As she reaches out and touches his shoulder, the Misfit springs back and shoots her three times in the chest. Now that the Grandmother has become a trinitarian symbol herself, the three shots are entirely necessary. For the Misfit, the trigger has replaced the tongue, an unanswerable denial that cancels out communion because it would force him to challenge his invincible illusion of completeness. As he himself has already asserted to the Grandmother: "I don't want no hep', he said. 'I'm doing all right by myself.'"
- 22 With the girl in "The Temple of the Holy Ghost" and the Grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the reader is asked to consider characters who have been fixed and transfixed by certitude and self-centeredness, but who, in a crisis of doubt and inadequacy, have transformed themselves by transforming their voices, inner and outer. The boy in "The River" is confronted with a different problem since he is too young to have a voice of his own to transform, and is shown linguistically lost, especially in his own household, among the negating sounds of cynicism, jocularly, and indifference.
- 23 Very briefly, I promise, I want to suggest that Flannery O'Connor once more uses the associations of the Holy Ghost with the searching power of language to dramatize the boy's dilemma, and, more surprisingly perhaps, to explain and justify his final decision. We encounter the boy first in his "dark living room," completely passive, acted on, but unable to act himself. He is described as "limp" while he is being "pulled" and "buttoned" and "pushed," all in the first short paragraph. Waiting for Mrs Connin to take him away, he stares at her "silently," "mute and patient, like an old sheep waiting to be let out." Almost the first word he says is "Bevel," in answer to Mrs Connin's question about his name. It is a lie, of course. His real name is Harry, Harry Ashfield. But he has heard Mrs Connin mention the preacher's name, Bevel Summers, and he repeats it, unconsciously assuming the possibility of a new identity. Prospectively, the act of naming himself rehearses his self-baptism in the river at the end of the story, uniting the baptizer and the baptized in the same person, and prepares the reader for the ironic reversals of death and rebirth in the same conclusion.
- 24 Throughout the strange events of the day, O'Connor plays with the reader's assumptions and expectations. On the face of it, the boy's experience winds its way through an archetypal initiation baptism narrative, in which we see him caught up in a

sort of pilgrim's progress through a fallen world filled with religious signs and solicitations. He has to pass through what we could call "the valley of the pig" and escape the negative trinity of Mrs Connin's freckled sons. We should never forget, though, his extreme youth, and the fact that we, the readers, are tempted to impose significance on situations that he himself responds to emotionally, above all. The reflexive instincts of fear and fascination move him onward much more than conscious deliberation. Still, he is dimly aware that he is at least moving, and reacting, instead of being "buttoned" up at home. In the one passage in which his inner thoughts are clearly evoked, after and despite his fearsome encounter with the pig, he reflects that he is better off having left home: "It occurred to him that he was lucky this time that they had found Mrs. Connin who would take you away for the day instead of an ordinary sitter who only sat where you lived or went to the park. You found out more when you left where you lived." His instincts are what guides his steps after he is baptized by his namesake, and discovers he is going to have to act on his own if he is to "go under the river" and leave the apartment for good.

- 25 More to my point is the way O'Connor radicalizes the theme of language, and urges the reader to reconsider the aim and direction of her satire. Some critics and probably many readers locate the satire in the portraits of the rural revivalists. But to Flannery O'Connor I suspect they possess a knowledge, distorted though it may be, well beyond the stereotypes of their education and social status. Mrs Connin's very name is cognate with cunning, and the rare name Bevel implies the odd angle, or perspective, that goes against the grain, and warns against reducing all existence to the same level.
- 26 There is a satirical thrust in the story, but as always the target of the thrust is certitude and self-satisfaction. The boy may not understand the significance of all that is said to him, but he hears the note of negation in the way his parents reduce all life to a joke, and turns away. He then listens and responds to the appeal of meaning, of counting for something, and goes forward to the river. The two poles of the boy's short experience are, on one hand, the sounds of indifference and jocularly echoing statically in his dark house, and, on the other, the sounds of "finding out...when you leave" associated with the flowing water of the river. Drowning, he thinks to himself: "For an instant he was overcome with surprise: then...he was moving quickly and knew he was getting somewhere."
- 27 Borrowing, or perhaps, mis-borrowing, the fashionable term phonocentrism, I want to argue that O'Connor in "The River" radicalizes the concept, going beyond the claim of primal "significance" in the spoken word. In fact, she seems to want to divest language of the need for fixed meaning, and to focus instead on its power of movement, of flowing forward, dissatisfied, reaching out perpetually towards the missing completeness. Thus, we are once more back in the realm of the Holy Ghost. What puzzled me most in arriving at this conclusion, was the sense that for once, the dramatic logic of the character's action seems to contradict rather than reinforce the Catholic doctrines behind all of O'Connor's work. After all, the boy does commit suicide. I was relieved, then, to find, almost by chance, unindexed, hidden away in a collection of O'Connor's conversations (*Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*), proof that O'Connor herself was not in the least troubled by the contradiction. The interview was published in a small Catholic college journal, *The Censer*, in the Fall of 1960. I'll leave you then, without having to call on the Holy Ghost myself, with O'Connor's own conclusion. She, if anyone, deserves to have the final word :

Interviewers : One critic says that it is grace that leads Bevel to drown himself in the river. Is that true ? Miss O'Connor : Bevel hasn't reached the age of reason ; therefore he can't commit suicide. He comes to a good end. He's saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He's been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end.

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NOTES

1. This paper was first presented as a talk at the University of Angers on January 28, 2005. I would like to thank the editors of JSSE for allowing me to publish it in its original, unrevised form.

ABSTRACTS

Les lecteurs des nouvelles de Flannery O'Connor auront sûrement remarqué les multiples allusions au Saint-Esprit, insérées sous une forme ou une autre. L'une des nouvelles utilise même ces mots en guise de titre, " Le Temple du Saint-Esprit " (" The Temple of the Holy Ghost "), et de nombreuses autres y font référence de manière directe, iconographique ou implicite. " The Enduring Chill "allie les trois et ajoute une autre dimension en présentant le Saint-Esprit comme un personnage humain, sous l'apparence du mystérieux prêtre Jésuite, Ignatius Vogle, dont le nom et l'unique profession de foi dans " The Third Person of the Trinity ", parcourent l'histoire du début jusqu'à la fin. Lire les nouvelles de Flannery O'Connor m'a amené à croire que la présence du Saint-Esprit joue un rôle essentiel dans la signification profonde de cette satire. Cependant, je tiens à insister sur le fait que mon intérêt pour la fonction du Saint-Esprit dans les trois nouvelles que j'étudie est bien plus d'ordre dramatique que doctrinal. Certes, Flannery O'Connor elle-même affirmerait sans aucun doute que la dimension doctrinale, ou ce qu'elle appellerait la dimension anagogique du Saint-Esprit, est, finalement, plus importante que la dimension dramatique. Pourtant je suis sûr qu'elle admettrait aussi que sans cet effet dramatique, l'histoire court le risque de tourner au sermon et de sacrifier l'art au profit de la théologie.

AUTHORS

BEN FORKNER

Ben Forkner was Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Angers up until his retirement in 2009. He is the Founding Editor of the *Journal of the Short Story in English* (JSSE) and founder of the Anthony Burgess Centre (ABC). His recent work includes *A John James Audubon Portfolio*, published by La Main Fleurie in 2004, and a tribute to Benedict Kiely, "The Long Way Round," given as a talk at the Benedict Kiely Literary Weekend in Omagh, in 2008, and printed in a limited edition by the University Press of Angers in 2009.